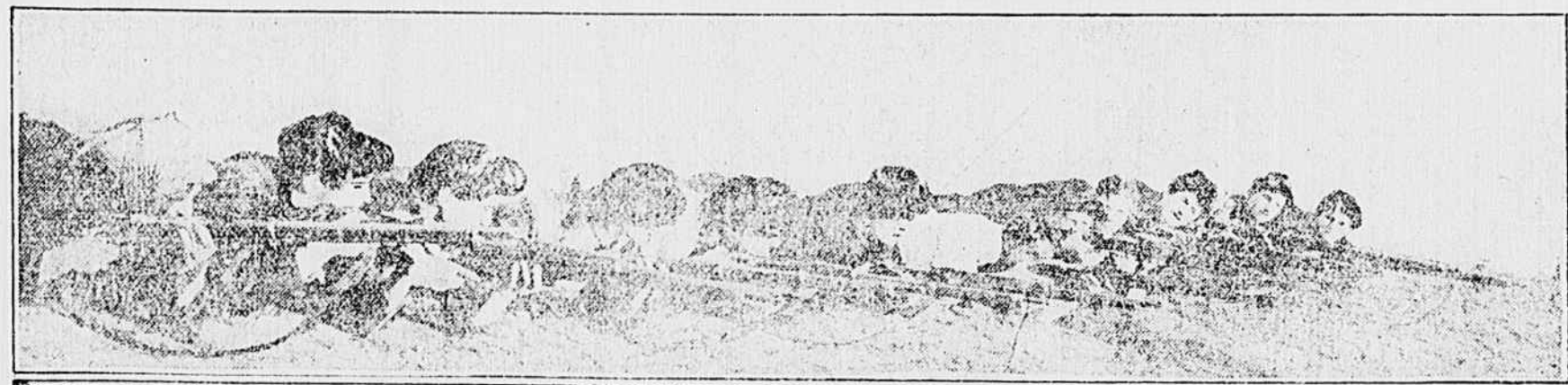


February 28, 1915

Copyright, 1915, by the
Star Company.
Great Britain Rights Reserved

Women Soldiers Now on the Firing Line.



The "Legion of Death," a Regiment of Servian Women at Rifle Practice Before Being Sent to the Front Against the Austro-German Forces.

How They Are Fighting in the Trenches Side by Side with the Men, Undergoing All the Hardships of War, and Being Promoted to Lieutenants, Captains and Colonels Through Their Bravery

FROM time to time since the great war began reports have leaked through of women fighting in the trenches side by side with their husbands, brothers and lovers or simply their own countrymen. These reports have been received with more or less incredulity. It did not seem possible that women could undergo the hardships, the complete reversal of all their habits and the primitive manners that necessarily accompany trench life.

Incredulity has, however, given way before actual official reports of women decorated and promoted for bravery on the battlefields. It seems now that in Europe the women actually do put on the uniform of the men, fight not only in trenches, but in the cavalry, and in every way measure up to the standard of a soldier.

Indeed, they are harder to conquer. It seems, than the men. A recent semi-official report from Petrograd mentioned that the Russians were surprised, when they captured a line of trenches along the Bzura River in Poland, to find a number of German women among their captives. These women were found in the very first line, with hot rifles still in their hands.

"There was much more difficulty in making these women prisoners than the men," reported the officer in charge of the victors. "They would not surrender until after all their men comrades had their arms, and they taunted our soldiers. These women were, of course, unsexed peasants, and all the marks of a developed that only a uniform because of their company, and because of

which there had been so much human joy before and so much misery after. I was riding with a company of twenty-five men to trace the retreating enemy. Though the amphitheatric hills that rose before us seemed dead and bare, yet mysterious flashes of light appeared here and there, like magic signals. They warned us of the hidden batteries of the enemy. As we galloped on, I could see the road strewn with broken boxes,

the direction where the one before had fallen.

"Little by little I could see dots in every direction beyond the ribbon. A few figures climbed out and started running toward us. 'One, two, three!' I whispered and then followed a salvo from my men. The figures either fell or ran back behind the ribbon. From behind a hill flashed a light and then the battery of the enemy opened fire at the village where we were. It was the machine guns. 'Nuka, Misha, tickle the daddies, quick!' was the humorous remark of one of my soldiers to me. We must have killed and wounded a hundred or more. Then we turned around and rode away, without having lost a single man and without having any men wounded."

Mme. Colonel Koudasheva is a student of soldier psychology on the battlefield, as is shown in another letter.

"When you feel the invisible fingers of fate so close to your life, as on the battlefield, the problems that interest you before and the feelings that you experi-



Stanislaw Ordinska, a Woman Soldier in the Polish League of Austria Who Has Been Promoted to Sergeant for Bravery at the Front.



Servian Women Recruits for the "Legion of Death" Receiving First Instructions After Enlistment.

ence in a peaceful feminine activity die out and a new view opens. It is not the feeling of sport, it is not the feeling of being killed, that takes hold of the mind on the battlefield, but it is a queer, dramatic hypnosis, like an actor feels before opening a play.

"It all seems a huge cosmic play—a stern tragic panorama of life—but still a play. The whole human organism seems to work against all laws of nature, for, cold and rain day and night, yet you catch no cold, no ailments that are usual in everyday life."

Mme. Colonel Koudasheva may require a strict discipline of her inferiors, but she never applies any punitive measures. She commands with the most polite words. "Gentlemen, please, would you do me the favor" is her usual command to the soldiers. "My boys and girls go to any fire without any forcible measures," she writes. "I just need to hint at an instruction, and already it is carried out. I have taught them not to shoot with hate, but to love the man they shoot. And they do love, which is proven by an incident when once we chased the enemy into a river and when we saw that they would be drowned we all went to pull them out,

and thus saved a whole company."

Another Russian heroine is Natalie Tychnina, a high school girl of Kiev, who has received the decoration of the Order of St. George for distinguished service at the front. She had arrived at Opatow among a detachment of volunteers for the campaign against the Austrians. She was dressed like a man, and passed for a remarkably handsome boy. She was detailed to carry ammunition to the trenches. She was in the hottest fire and was wounded twice. The Russians were forced to retire, and she was left lying on the field.

The Austrian Red Cross workers found her. "Why, this is a woman!" exclaimed the Austrian surgeon who examined her. The Austrians nursed her. When the Russians again took Opatow she was still in a hospital. She was recaptured by them and sent back to Kiev, where she was given her honors.

Austrian women are also fighting. Stefa Falica is a young Croat who enlisted with her husband in the same regiment. In this case her sex was well-known, and she was not forced to use men's clothes. She has already been made a corporal for her bravery in the field.

A similar case is that of Stanislaw Ordinska, who enlisted, masquerading as a man, in the Polish Legion for Austria. She was made a sergeant for bravery shown at the front before it was discovered she was a woman. Then she was allowed to keep her rank and her gun.

One of the most interesting bodies of women soldiers is the Serbian organization called the "Legia Smirti," or Legion of Death.

The Legion of Death is composed of women who have been trained in the use of firearms and in the science of war. In the Balkan States, where women frequently follow their husbands through-

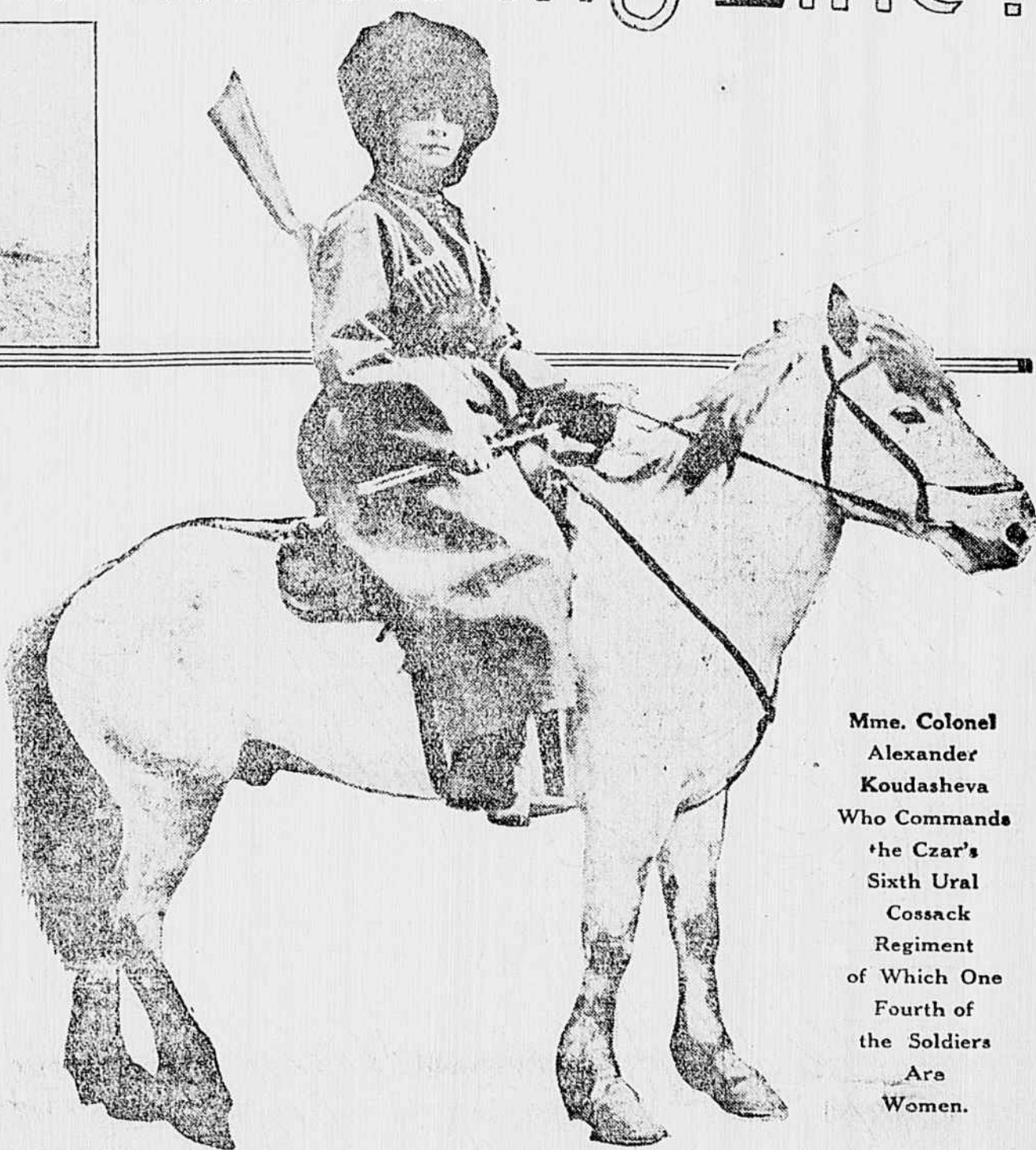
out military campaigns, acting as pack carriers, camp attendants, and even as trench-diggers and sappers when necessary. It is not unusual for them to take their places beside their husbands or their lovers on the firing line. There are many expert rifle shots among them, many indeed who are capable of taking men's places under necessity. Accustomed to attack in solitary places, and more or less injured to bereavement, a kind of grim quiet follows them wherever they are seen.

The Legion of Death is recruited from all classes of women, from the wives of rich merchants to the wives and daughters of peasants. This Amazon corps had its origin in the patriotic enthusiasm of a woman sixty-two years old, whose husband died for Serbia in the war for liberty against the Turks. The women handle the regulation rifles and are held in deadly fear by the Austrians and Germans.

Indeed, it seems that on both sides the soldiers dread the women soldiers more than they do those of their own sex.

Killing's "The male of the species is more deadly than the female," recalls itself, of course. Dr. Hans Huidackson, writing of this same phenomenon, said:

"Women are not natural combatants. They do not rush into war for war's sake. They are without the blood lust that makes fighting a joy for fighting's sake. They will fight only in desperate straits, and then only for their honor, their children or the existence of their country. Standing at one of these last ditches,



Mme. Colonel Alexander Koudasheva Who Commands the Czar's Sixth Ural Cossack Regiment of Which One Fourth of the Soldiers Are Women.



Mme. Colonel Koudasheva Showing the Trousers and Typical Male Dress She Wears on the Battlefield.

however, they fight with the ferocity of tigers. They do battle without rule or reason and to the death. An English woman, who is endeavoring to organize a company of women for military training, said that she did not fear that they would not fight, but the fear was that they might fight too fiercely. They are the most cruel of combatants when they so far overcome their native womanly gentleness as to enter into combat.

"A soldier of experience said that he would rather fight a company of male soldiers than one woman soldier. He explained that woman is too resourceful in the matter of weapons. War transforms woman for the time into a beast."